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OUR PARIS LETTER.

DECORATIVE ART IN PARIS.

The seventh biennial exhibition of the Union Centrale des Arts Decoratifs, now open at the Palais de l'Industrie, naturally claims chief attention at the present moment, as a record of industrial art work in Paris. It is the daily rendezvous of adepts in taste, as well as of the practical artists, who go there to seek inspiration in the study of the masterpieces of the past, and a spirit of emulation from the sight of the production of their rivals. The present exhibition is devoted to the arts of wood, textile fabrics and paper. As M. Paul Mantz, the administrator of the Government Fine Arts Department, said in his speech at the opening: "Each of our Exhibitions ought to be a lesson. We seek this lesson everywhere, and that is why, respectful of its traditions, the Union Centrale will associate with the new creations furnished by the industries of wood, textile fabrics and paper, the inexhaustible attraction of a retrospective museum; for proud as we may be of our actual skill, we cannot forget either the great cabinet-makers of the past, or the carvers who decorated wood with such proud arabesques, or the famous upholsterers, or the embroiderers, who were formerly looked upon as artists, or the clever masters, who knew how to give to a look of thought, a vesture of grace."

With the hope of making use in future articles of the observations which this exhibition has enabled me to make,

pond with the painting of the school of David, Horace Vernet and Leopold Robert. Fights between Brigands and Roman carabineers, dances on the shore of the Bay of Naples, with a bright blue sky and a pumpkin-colored Vesuvius in the distance. Then with Louis Philippe we come to the Gothic subjects, outcome of Walter Scott's novels, Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, and the romantic movement in general, castles by the sea, troubadours, mediæval hawking and hunting scenes. Then scenes go out of fashion altogether, and there is a return to floral ornaments; people have had enough of the battle of Austerlitz, of the history of Psyche, of the races in the Corso at Rome, of a run with the hounds "cross country." For a moment flowers are sufficient, worked in with architectural ornaments, verandahs, columns, balustrades, vases, etc. With the Second Empire, the human figure is banished from wall-paper, except in a few coarse and cheap comic designs for country inns. After this we arrive at the fac-simile period, imitation lace, imitation velvet, imitation damask, imitation tapestry, and here the word imitation is used in no disparaging sense.

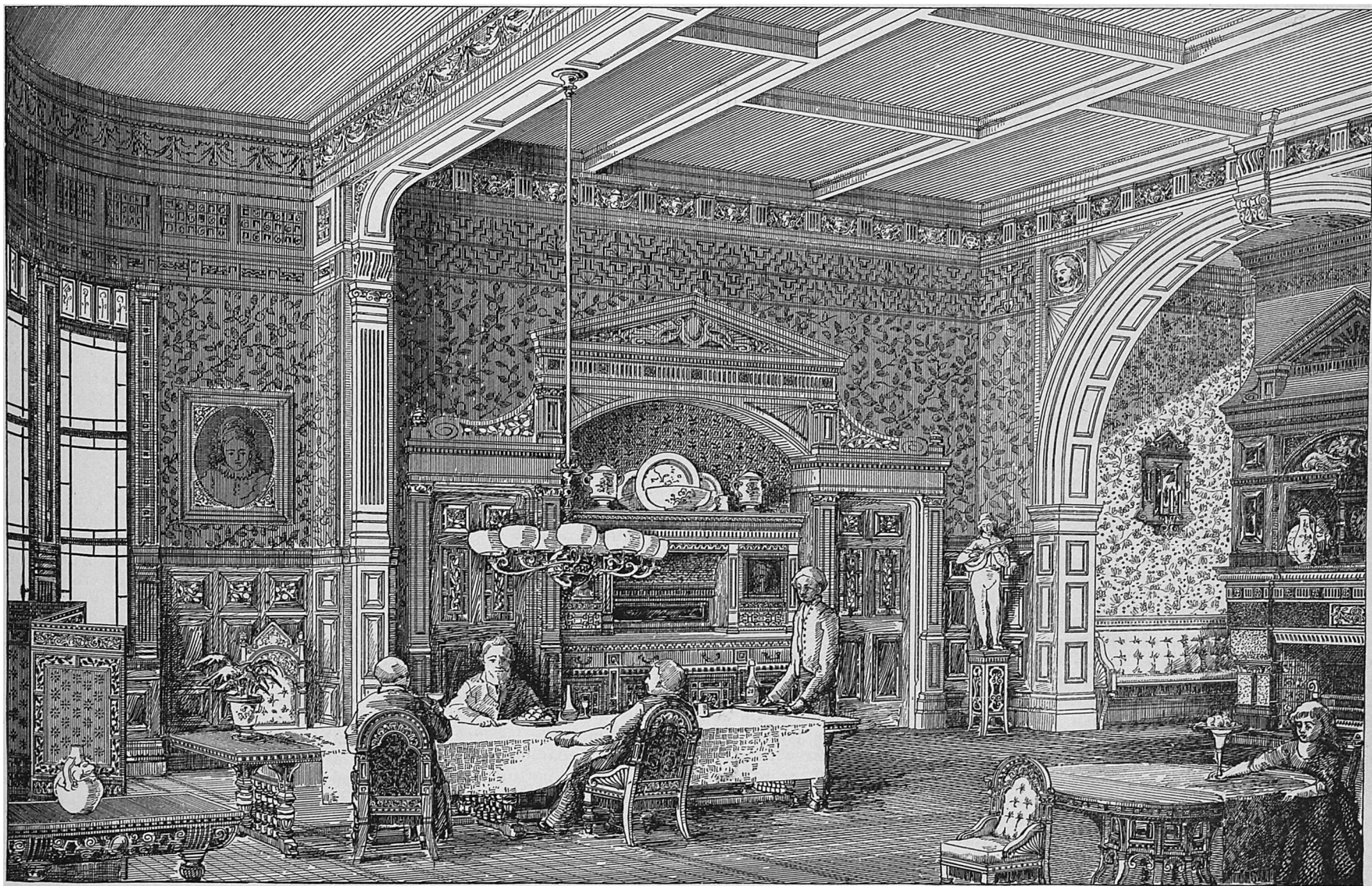
The modern wall-papers are marvelous productions, whether they have been printed *a la planche*, that is to say by hand, or by machine, by means of cylinders engraved in relief. The most precious tissues of China, of Japan, of Persia, the finest silks and brocades, Genoa velvet, reps, damask, lampas, the leathers of Hungary, Portugal, Flanders, the tapestry of the Gobelins, stuffs of all kinds, honeycombed, diapered, plush, felted, smooth, brilliant, neat, the touches of gold and silver, even mother of pearl have been imitated to perfection by means of the old processes of paper-painting, combined with those of stamping, which are daily rendered more delicate, more subtle, more sure. The beauty of the result is such that the material used is indifferent. Provided the wall-paper gives the perfect aspect of silk, leather, damask; provided the sensation of these fine productions is not troubled by any apprehension, it matters little whether the thing be real or not. A wall-paper imitating silk would be ridiculous if employed to make a lady's dress, but on the wall there is no valid ob-

material, called here *toile a torchon*, and commonly used for scouring cloth. This material is semi-transparent, and requires a backing of red, which gives it a warm rosy hue. Then decorate it with appliqué borders, and ornaments of *fleur de lys*, or heraldic designs of deep red, and finish off the edges of curtains and other hangings with coarse lace, red and ecru.

I notice for ingenuity and elegant work, the Lampe convertible envelope card-tables. When closed the table forms a square of twenty-three inches, and serves as a work-table. This top consists of four triangular leaves, which fold in like the back of an envelope and which, when open, make a square of thirty-two inches. The top revolves one-eighth of the circle, so as to bring each of these leaves to rest on a leg of the table. The newest design in this table is a Louis XV. article, with gilt bronze ornaments at corners, and the top in *cloisonne marqueterie*, reproducing a Japanese flower design, the *cloisons* being brass and the flowers inlaid wood.

Beside the inlaid wood processes, or "marqueteries," which are modifications of veneering where the wood is used in thin layers, a process of wood mosaic is exhibited by M. Cretinon, 159 Faubourg St. Antoine. The wood is dyed in square lengths and cut into cubes, which are employed like the cubes in marble or glass mosaics. The process may be of advantage in parquet floors, wainscoting, ceilings, fancy furniture, etc. The idea is good enough, but M. Cretinon does not seem to have yet perfected his application of it.

A more effective and delicate style of ornamentation is one exhibited by the firm of Julien Simon, a famous Paris house, for lacquer and Martin varnish furniture. This consists of panels painted in Barbotine, and let into furniture, for instance, horizontally at the foot and head of a bedstead, perpendicularly in the wardrobe, etc. The painting is called Barbotine, simply because, as in the Barbotine painting on faience, the painting is between two varnishes. The painting is thick, in fact almost a low relief. The effect is very elegant, particularly as I saw it employed to decorate a Louis XV. bedroom suite of unpolished walnut.



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INTERIOR OF DINING ROOM.

in different branches of the furnisher's and decorator's arts, I propose in the present letter to dwell at some length on the paper-hanging industry, and to conclude with a bundle of odd notes and jottings on novelties in general.

Without being a modern invention, since it comes originally from China, the manufacture of paper-hanging or painted paper, "papier peint," may be considered as a French creation, or rather as a Parisian invention, for it was in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, that it was born a second time, and in less than a century it has produced marvels. It was in 1785, just on the eve of the Revolution, that Reveillon of Paris and Zuber of Mulhouse, perfected their processes which gave a new impulse to the industry, an industry which in France now annually produces some two hundred and fifty-five millions of yards of paper, enough to go six times round the world.

One of the most interesting departments of the exposition of Decorative Art, is the exhibition of specimens of wall-paper from 1730 to 1882. Besides being the history of an art, it is the history of a century and a half, a history of the preoccupations, the tastes, the crazes, the fashions of the country. From 1730 to 1785 the wall-papers are simple in color, the designs are Louis XV. and Louis XVI., corresponding with the furniture, imitations of drapery, of cornices, etc. The set scenes are shepherds and shepherdesses of the Watteau school, or scenes from the popular romances of the day, Marmontel's *Les Incas* and *Paul and Virginia*, Turkish scenes, Chinese compositions, etc. With the Revolution the wall paper became stern and classical. Flowing draperies are replaced by rigid Roman togas, the consular fasces, the victor's axe, the liberty cap. The fantastic ornaments of the old regime give place to escutcheons with the words "Law," "Justice," "Peace." The Empire and the Restoration produced wall-papers to corre-

jection to be made against it, in spite of what some esthetic purists may say.

To attempt to fully describe the marvels of the modern paper-hangings now being made in Paris, would be vain, for it would require a volume. One of the most beautiful products is an imitation of Genoa velvet, brown foliage on a gold ground. Some of the papers, inspired by Japanese designs, are exquisite—a flight of cranes, on a salmon-trout colored background, with intertwining foliage of willow green, the cranes deep violet and black, with the light flared on their wings by gold reflections; the conventional Japanese apple-blossom, with gnarled and knotted wood on a ground of mat gold, imitating lacquer. But there is no end to the variety of design, and now that the impulse is once given in favor of Japanese motives and Oriental brilliancy of color, we may expect the finest results from the delicate and splendid machinery at the disposal of our modern artists.

I draw particular attention to this retrospective sketch of paper-hangings, as it is a feature which might, with profit and interest, be repeated in any country.

A novelty in fancy furniture is the use of gimp cord instead of cane, for the seats of chairs, tops of light tables, and panels. It is not highly artistic, but it is a change, and some people prefer novelty to beauty.

Various kinds of pine, pitch pine, yellow pine, etc., are being largely used now for light furniture for country and seaside houses. The simplest Louis XVI. shapes, or very simple Gothic, with trefoil ornaments, are used. The wood is merely varnished, and the pillars fluted, the grooves may be picked out with red or rose-pink lacquer paint. For the upholstery of a bedroom of this style, flowered chintz may be used, or cretonne flowers on a white ground. Line with sky blue, and loop up the drapery with a multicolored cord, recalling the colors of the pattern. The pine furniture looks admirable in a room hung with a loosely woven unbleached

I suppose the American manufacturers are acquainted with a South American wood, called here "vermeil." It is a kind of birch, with a close, feathery grain, like masses of cirrus clouds, and a luminous golden color, hence the French name of "vermeil" or silver-gilt. I am told that it is a new thing here. I saw a beautiful Louis XV. bedroom suite made of this wood, which marries exquisitely with decorations of garlands of roses, and ornaments in unburnished gilt bronze, reproduced from the finest Eighteenth Century work.

For the decoration of furniture, for fancy articles and small furniture, "bois durci," or hardened wood, is being largely used, where cheapness is a consideration. The material is rosewood sawdust, compressed by hydraulic pressure in steel moulds. The piano manufacturers are using this cheap decoration very largely.

Here are the details of a set of ball-room furniture, just completed by Gueret freres, for the Princess X. A sofa, five yards long, four arm chairs; twelve wall chairs (chaises meublantes); twelve light chairs; one X stool; two marquises (short, square, double-ended sofas); one borne-jardiniere; one console; one jardiniere with pedestal; two centre tables; four sets of window curtains; four sets of portieres. The style is ornate Louis XIV., unpolished walnut, with the ornamental carving gilded and burnished. The upholstery is varied; the heavy pieces are upholstered in Genoa velvet deep crimson floriated design, on a golden yellow ground; the light chairs are upholstered in a red figured silk, of a design analogous to, but not the same as that of the Genoa velvet; the two marquises are upholstered in lampas, or figured silk, of a greenish gold tint. The red and greenish gold colors are repeated in the curtains and portieres, and the cord-fixings and tassels are very massive and set off with gold. The set is very elegant in form and workmanship, and the upholstery is executed with that sure taste that is the pride of the best French houses.